

Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society

NEWSLETTER

Society website: www.lowestoftlocalhistory.co.uk

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What's On

11 January "That's Odd! The story of Rushmere Church" by Terry Weatherley

25 January "Gorleston and the National Coast Watch" by Bill Richmond & Jack Wells

8 February "Georgian Lowestoft – a pictorial tour" by Chris Brooks

22 February "The Lost Houses of Suffolk" by Alan Mackley

All meetings are held in the SOUTH LOWESTOFT METHODIST CHURCH HALL, at the corner of LONDON ROAD SOUTH and CARLTON ROAD, at 7.30 pm (Entry via LONDON ROAD SOUTH)

Please ring bell if the door is locked

Chairman's Column

I wish you all a very happy New Year, and hope you had an enjoyable Christmas.

At the last meeting, Peter Parker told us about the History of the Lowestoft and East Suffolk Marine Society from its start in 1958. Our own Society is now more than 40 years old, so we have a lot in common.

The pre-Christmas buffet was held at the Yacht Club on Tuesday December 5th. We had a plentiful buffet, a raffle and a quiz, and hope you enjoyed the evening.

The Museum in Broad House will re-open on Monday 2nd April, which is the beginning of Easter week.

We are still awaiting to hear the Council's decision on what is to happen about Nancy's old flat. Who would have thought they would take so long to decide? Will it eventually become part of the Museum?

Before the Museum re-opens, we would certainly welcome more helpers. I shall be arranging a meeting, probably in March, to welcome all helpers – new and old, but there will be more

news of that later. Also, we would be grateful to anyone willing to organise and run our small gift shop in the Museum.

Incidentally, a working party meets each Monday morning throughout the year – whether the Museum is open or closed – and new helpers are always welcome.

This evening, Terry Weatherly will be telling us the story of Rushmere Church, which is something to look forward to, for Terry is always full of interesting information. Then, at the next meeting on 28th January we shall welcome Bill Richmond and Jack Wells to tell us about Gorleston and the National Coast Watch.

With good wishes, **Lilian Fisher**

Local Events:

1 Interested in Water Towers? On Friday 26 January, at the Long Shop Museum in Leiston, there is a talk by Barry Barton on The Water Towers of Great Britain. Admission is free.

2 The Suffolk Record Office in Lowestoft is organising three series of events starting this month.

a) Family History Workshops

b) Property History, Old Handwriting and Military Ancestors Workshops

c) Talks and Walks

See the Secretary's Table for full details.

Please hand in any items you have for inclusion in the Newsletter at the Society meetings.

Don't worry if spelling is not your strong point, we can help out.

9 November 2006, Bombs, beams and boffins – the secret site at Orford Ness by Paddy Hezell.

Paddy Hezell works for the National Trust who currently own the spit of land known as Orford Ness.

From 1914 to 1993 it was used by the Ministry of Defence, originally as an airfield and later for weapons research.

In the Middle Ages the land was used for grazing, the RAF drained it to make it suitable for their use and the National Trust has now returned some of the land to grazing. Buildings of historical importance have been preserved whilst others have been demolished. During World War I the RAF station had 600 personnel and operated two airfields. These did not have runways as the aeroplanes landed on the grass.

Early research carried out there included work on investigating whether silencers could be fitted to fighter engines, so they would not be heard by the enemy as they approached. It was concluded that the power loss with the silencer rendered the aircraft useless as a fighter.

After World War I, Orford Ness was used to test parachutes, armaments, bomb designs and aircraft bombing formations. The parachutes were not intended for aircrew but for use in dropping flares. Aircrew were not issued with parachutes until 1925. Trials were also carried out on the most effective way to bomb railway lines.

In 1935 work was started on radar design and development, although this was later moved to Bawdsey. Airborne radar was developed which was very successful and to hide this success from the Germans it was announced that the RAF pilots were eating carrots to improve their eyesight.

During World War II captured enemy guns were fired at our aircraft to find out how defences could be improved to minimise damage. Also, captured aircraft were shot at by our guns to determine what changes were needed to inflict the greatest damage on them. Armaments for the Hurricane and Spitfire were tested here.

In the mid 1950's a test range was constructed to test the Bluestreak missile. The flight of the missile was monitored on cameras after it was fired down the range, to perfect the trajectory.

Many of the buildings standing today were built for the testing of atomic bomb triggering mechanisms. These tests were to perfect safety features and to guard against false detonation of the bombs. The environmental testing included heating, freezing, vibrating and accelerating, and decelerating, to a high 'G' force to check that the firing mechanism did not malfunction. This testing finished in 1967.

Today the site is open to visitors under the management of the National Trust.

23 November 2006 The History of the Lowestoft and East Suffolk Maritime Society by Peter Parker.

Peter began his talk by explaining how the Society and Museum were started. The Society was formed in 1958, as the East Suffolk Marine Society. After reviewing and rejecting various buildings that were offered by the Borough Council, the Museum was started in 1967 in the cottage at its present location. Between these dates small exhibitions were displayed in a number of the town's shop windows. The Museum was opened in 1968 by the Duke of Edinburgh.

In 1974, discussions were held between the Marine Society and the Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society with a view to forming a joint Museum, but this did not happen. In 1975 the Society changed its name to the Lowestoft and East Suffolk Maritime Society.

In 1977 the Museum was extended and the new room was named after Bill Soloman, who had played a leading role in the founding of the Society. Unfortunately Bill died three months before the opening. Three years later the Museum was extended again when the picture gallery was opened. They are currently planning another extension.

When, in 1988, it was decided to re-new the Armada post that stands at the top of Martin's Score, the Society took on the task, with help from some local companies, and a donation from the Lowestoft Journal.

Peter showed many slides of the Museum over the years, together with the team of helpers, showing how the Museum and the artefacts had changed. He also told of some of the problems that had been encountered, such as the fire in the cabin in 1981, and how these had been dealt with.

A recent acquisition has been some models of boats, plus a box of photographs, that came from Richards Shipyard. When Richards closed, the parent company moved these items to the Tate & Lyle Museum in London. These are now back in the town where they belong.